

NCA  
VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5911  
BERNARD KAPLAN/PARIS

JUNE 14, 1978

## FRENCH COMMUNIST WOMEN

ANNCR:

IN FRANCE, THE WOMEN MEMBERS OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY HAVE NOW BEEN GIVEN THEIR TURN TO CHALLENGE THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND POLICY. BERNARD KAPLAN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM PARIS:

VOICE:

EVER SINCE THE FRENCH LEFT UNEXPECTEDLY LOST THE GENERAL ELECTION HERE LAST MARCH, THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO A GROWING INTERNAL DEBATE OVER ITS POLICY. NOW, FRENCH COMMUNIST WOMEN HAVE ENTERED THE DISPUTE IN EARNEST. SOME OF THEM CLAIM THAT THE PARTY SUFFERS, IN EFFECT, FROM WHAT COULD BE CALLED MALE CHAUVINIST CAMARADERIE. THEIR CHALLENGE IS CONSIDERED SO SERIOUS THAT THE PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL GEORGE MARCHAIS HAS BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED. HE MADE A PAGE-LONG APPEAL TO THE PARTY'S WOMAN MEMBERS IN THE OFFICIAL PARTY NEWSPAPER NOT TO STRAY FROM THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE NAME OF FEMALE EMANCIPATION.

THE UPROAR CAME INTO THE OPEN LAST WEEK, AND THE PARIS NEWSPAPER "LE MONDE" PUBLISHED A LENGTHY DECLARATION BY FIVE WELL-KNOWN WOMAN PARTY MEMBERS CLAIMING THAT THE PARTY NO LONGER IS IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE BATTLE FOR SEXUAL EQUALITY. THEY CHARGED THAT THE PARTY'S VIEWS ON WOMEN HAVE REMAINED TRADITIONALIST -- ESSENTIALLY CONFINING WOMEN TO THEIR HISTORIC ROLES AS WIVES AND MOTHERS.

AS ONE EXAMPLE, THE FIVE WOMEN SAID THAT THE PARTY HAD LAGGED BADLY BEHIND OTHER GROUPS IN DEMANDING GREATER LEGAL PROTECTION AGAINST RAPE. INSIDE THE PARTY ITSELF, THEY ASSERTED THAT IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT WOMEN COMPRISED NEARLY ONE-THIRD

OF THE MEMBERSHIP, FEMALE PARTY MEMBERS FEEL SEGREGATED AND ARE DISCOURAGED FROM PRESENTING A FEMININE VIEWPOINT. HOW MANY WOMEN, THEY ASKED, DARE TO SPEAK OUT AT PARTY MEETINGS?

BUT THE FACT THAT THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP REGARDS SUCH CRITICISM AS INADMISSIBLE IS CLEAR ENOUGH. FIVE WOMEN HAD ORIGINALLY TRIED TO HAVE THEIR DECLARATION PUBLISHED IN THE PARTY'S PAPER "L'HUMANITE" BUT WERE TURNED DOWN. THEN, AS OTHER PARTY DISSIDENTS HAVE RECENTLY DONE, THEY WENT TO "LE MONDE" -- GENERALLY REGARDED AS FRANCE'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS NEWSPAPER BUT WHICH HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A PLATFORM FOR COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERS WHO ARE DENIED A HEARING IN THEIR OWN PUBLICATION.

IN HIS APPEAL TO THE WOMEN OF THE PARTY, MISTER MARCHAIS CATEGORICALLY DENIED THE VALIDITY OF FEMINIST POLITICS AS A SEPARATE MOVEMENT. WOMEN WHO ARE SEEKING JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR THEIR OWN SEX JOIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY, HE SAID, FOR PRECISELY THAT REASON. TO MAKE ANY CLAIMS FOR FEMINISM ALONE WILL BE DECLARED A FRAUD." BUT MISTER MARCHAIS DID MAKE ONE APPARENT CONCESSION. HE CALLED ON HIS PARTY'S TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND WOMEN MEMBERS TO BE PARTICULARLY ATTENTIVE TO NEW TRENDS AND NEW NEEDS AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THEIR OWN SEX. NONETHELESS, OBSERVERS DOUBT THAT WILL PROVE ENOUGH TO END THE POLEMIC THEY HAVE STARTED.

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JS/RTD